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FATHER NOAH

BY THE SAME WRITER
THE BELLS OF PARADISE
THE ART OF NIJINSKY
A BOOK OF WHIMSIES
(With Keith Henderson)

FATHER. NOAH
AND OTHER FANCIES
BY
GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1918

TO A FRIEND AT THE FRONT

MY DEAR K.,

A state of war is little favourable to letter writing—such, at any rate, has been our own experience—and in dedicating to you this booklet of poems I shall be sending you news of someone from whom you have not heard for a long while. Certainly it were more fitting had the procedure been reversed. For what news have we who stay at home and dream of history to tell to those of you out there who are moulding history daily in your own flesh and blood? Nevertheless, one trusts that the mind of even a civilian may, on occasion, find its contact with reality; and you, at least, will not be too censorious with what is written here, reminded as you must find yourself—I hope not quite unpleasantly—of days that are gone.

Several of these verses you have seen before—relics, for the most part, of a time when young emotion was wont to express itself most vocally in terms of an immemorial regret. Here is no news of war-time England! For youth has now no truck with sentiment, and our brave Lieutenants have doubtless learnt to pluck the rose with all the less compunction that their gallantry is obliged to race the swift finale of a ten days' leave. No. These fancies of mine are 'other fancies' with a vengeance, and if you are now kind enough to re-read them, it can be only for that pleasure which old friends feel when they meet again after long absence, and regale themselves with many a 'Do you remember?'

Hardly more in tune, you will say, with interests of the

moment is a trifle like 'The Little Ballet,' which dates so manifestly from the period when Russia had come to be the Mecca of our æsthetic enthusiasm. Politically, it may be an open question whether Lenin or Czar Nicholas himself has proved the crueller to that disastrous land. But as the nursery of a Nijinsky or Karsarvina, there can surely be no question of our attachment to the Old Régime. And yet, how dare one even think of such things now, when for Ballet we are offered—you, my dear K., as an actor, I as a spectator—this incredible Dance of Death?

As for 'Father Noah,' that was written only last year; but already it has been criticized, by some who have read it in manuscript, as too simple, too primitively remote, for the taste of the hour. And I, in my innocence, had feared it more than a shade too topical! The truth is, I suspect, that these amiable critics were disconcerted to find God spoken of and thought of as someone actually real—as real as the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker, or the man next door. I am sorry. But, as you know, my dear K., it is thus I have been always taught to think of Him, and these old illusions die hard.

For the rest, I will be silent, leaving my little volume to beguile you as it may, and—what is more important—to bring you from beyond the din of battle a whisper of every good and happy greeting from yours ever,

G. A. W.

Easter, 1918.

NOTE

SOME of the poems in the latter section of this book have already appeared in *To-Day*, *Art and Letters*, and *The Open Window*.

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FATHER NOAH

Darkness in the Hold of the Ark, and Silence, except for the sound of creaking timbers as the great ship heaves to the swell, or for the cries and roars of the animals heard remote and muffled as though through walls of wood.

A sense of suffocation. And then, from above, the flickering light of a lantern, and the figure of Noah himself, descending warily by the ladder which leads from a trap door in the roof of the Hold, vertically to the floor.

He is very old.

THE VOICE OF A CHILD

Grandfather !

NOAH

Come, come.
It is quite safe.
You cannot fall,
And if you do
I am here.

THE CHILD'S VOICE

Grandfather,
I am frightened !

NOAH

Come;
Let me guide your feet with my hand,
And do not look downwards.
Keep your eyes fixed straight in front of you.

THE CHILD'S VOICE

Oh !

And now the figure of a girl, about nine years old, is seen following Noah, slowly and fearfully down the ladder.

NOAH

Come, come.

What will your mother say

When she hears that her little Rachel has been
down into the Hold of the Ark

Where no one has ever been save I, your grand-
father,

And your father Japheth,

And your two uncles, Shem and Ham !

Silence, while they come at last to the ground.

RACHEL

Oh, how glad I feel !

NOAH

You see there was nothing to be afraid of.

RACHEL

But what a queer musty smell !

One would say that we were in a cave of the
mountains,

Where the sun never shines,

And that has been sealed against the air of heaven
since the sixth day of creation !

Why is it so big, Grandfather, and nothing in it ?

NOAH

There are many things in the Hold my child.

*He turns the lantern so that its rays illumine the
dark corners.*

All the stores of the Ark.
There is the corn in that great bin—
And maize ;
Six hundred barrels of maize—
And the hay piled up.
Provender for man and beast.
See, here is the white flour which I came for.
I must take back a full measure.

*And he begins to ladle out the flour from the bin
into a measure of horn that hangs from his neck.
Rachel, meanwhile, goes peering about into the dark
corners of the Hold.*

RACHEL

What is this, Grandfather,
In this sack ?

NOAH

Seeds, my child,
For the birds—for the Doves and the Ravens.

RACHEL

And here ?

NOAH

Fresh earth for the worms.

RACHEL

Grandfather . . .

NOAH

Yes, my child ?

RACHEL

The raven

That you sent away from the Ark when it rested
upon the pinnacle of the mountain

Returns not.

Nor the dove,

My pretty dove that nestled against me,
Cooing as if she had found her mate.

Oh, Grandfather, sometimes I cannot help crying to
myself for the thought of her.

Think you that she is safe, out there,
Alone upon the face of the waters ?

NOAH

God careth for her.

RACHEL

When was she set free ?

Five days ago, was it not ?

NOAH

It was that day of the great wind,

When the Ark shifted from the pinnacle of the
mountain ;

And ever since we have drifted on

Towards the rising of the sun.

RACHEL

I pray to God every night for my dove.

*Silence again, while Noah goes on filling his measure
of flour, and Rachel continues her survey of the Hold.
Now she has wandered into a far corner, where the
shadows almost hide her from sight.*

Grandfather . . .

NOAH

My child ?

RACHEL

What is this ?

This great ring,

And the chain that hangs from the wall ?

Noah lets the lid of the flour-bin fall with a bang.

NOAH

Rachel !

What are you doing there ?

Drop that chain at once, I say !

RACHEL

I am sorry, grandfather.

NOAH

No, but I must not blame you.

How should you have known. . . .

RACHEL

Known what, Grandfather ?

NOAH

It is the bung-hole of the Ark.

This chain is fastened into the midst of a great wedge, do you see, that is kept in its place by ties of maple wood.

If the wedge were to become loosened,

Or if it were drawn away. . . .

RACHEL

Yes, Grandfather ?

NOAH

The waters would flow in

RACHEL

And the Ark would fill with water ?

NOAH

It would fill with water.

RACHEL

And the Ark would sink to the bottom of the sea ?

NOAH

With all that therein is.

Every morning I come down into the Hold

To see that the wedge is secure ;

For the whole world that God created is within
the walls of this Ark,

Both small and great and creeping thing,

And I am the father of all,

And it is by the will of God that I keep them safe.

RACHEL

And is it not your will also, Grandfather ?

NOAH

How dare man

That is but a creature

Measure his will by the will of the Lord God that
made him ?

RACHEL

Did God well to make the world, Grandfather ?

NOAH

Hush, child.

You do not understand.

Shall the clay judge the potter,
Or the child the father that begat him?

RACHEL

If I were God . . .

But now a commotion begins to be heard from the direction of the roof, and three robed men are seen following one another hastily down the ladder. They gesticulate excitedly and all talk at once.

THE THREE MEN

No, no. Yes, yes, I say. No, No! That is not the truth! It is the truth! Lies! Truth! You should die for this! Justice! Injustice most ashamed! Curses! To the death, I swear it! You said so! Never. You did! No, No! Yes, yes, I say!

NOAH

Hush, hush, my children.

What is this that you dispute among yourselves?

Have I not already enough to bear,

Have we not all of us enough to bear,

Without adding to our burden by these wrangles
of the nursery?

ONE OF THE THREE

This is no wrangle of the nursery, Father,

As you yourself will agree,

When you come to know the cause.

Your son Shem here . . .

SHEM

Do not listen to him, Father.
Rage has turned him mad.

NOAH

If Ham may not speak,
Why should I the rather listen to thee, Shem?

SHEM

I am the first-born son.

HAM

But I am the one aggrieved.

NOAH

I will listen to neither of you.
But Japheth,
If so be that the quarrel is none of his,
Let *him* make known the cause thereof.
Speak Japheth.

RACHEL (who has been standing by, affrighted, not knowing what to do)

Father . . .

She runs over to Japheth and puts her hand in his.

JAPHETH

So be it, brothers.
I will unfold the matter ;
And by these lips shall nothing but the truth be
spoken,
And neither of you two shall be advantaged the
one over the other,
Unless it be by the truth.

But first of all let the little maid depart,
For it is not meet that she should hear
How her uncles dispute together over her tender-
ness.

NOAH

Lead her away.

Japheth leads Rachel to the foot of the ladder, and encourages her to ascend. Then he returns, and stands in the midst before his father.

Speak now, my son.

JAPHETH

I know not well how to begin, Father.

Nevertheless,

According to my promise and my obedience will I
strive to make all things plain.

The matter brews these many days.

In the darkness of the night, and in the noonday
silences,

As we have lain, my brothers and I, by the window
that looks upon the North,

We have talked of many things.

And oftentimes have we harboured the thought that
our fate will be to die here in the Ark,

And my brothers have bemoaned their fate with
many lamentations.

But I have told them that already I have lived too
long,

Day in, day out, toiling as a young man,

Tending the flocks of my father,

And loving the woman that was given me to wife,

Having joy to see her big with my young,
And then to behold my child,
My little Rachel,
Growing up tall and straight and laughing in the
sunshine.
And withal this sorrow,
That no male thing has been given me for the
guerdon of my loins,
And my wife now nears the limit of child-bearing.

NOAH

Well do I know your sorrow, Japheth,
For your thought is not hid from me.
Yet how pertaineth this to your present trouble?

JAPHETH

It is even the whole cause
And the whole meaning thereof.

NOAH

How so, Japheth?

But Japheth makes no answer.

Come. Fear not to speak your mind.
For knowing not all,
Think you that I can give right judgment?

But still Japheth is silent.

SHEM

Look you, Father; It is even as I said.
Our brother cannot tell you this tale.
His shame hath gotten the better of him—
Even though the affair be none of his.

Let me, therefore, take up the tale where he has
dropped it,
For the matter is between me and my brother Ham,
And before God, I have no shame in it!
And if my tongue play me into false witness,
Let Ham take up the telling on my behalf.
Will *that* quieten thy scruples, brother, for thee?

HAM

Be it so, brother.

SHEM

Know then, Father, that to us,
Casting our minds forward to the days that shall be
when the flood is ended,
And the Ark sinks once again to the surface of the
land,
It has appeared to us well
That we should consider the division of our inherit-
ance of the earth
Which shall then be open to us.
For in the old days
It was your inheritance alone that was to be divided,
According to the law of our fathers, and of thy will.
But now shall the whole earth be ours,
And that is a great thing, Father,
A mighty inheritance,
One that may justly give cause for thought and
counsel.

NOAH

And is not the whole world wide enough
But that my three sons must dispute among
themselves
How it may be divided?

SHEM

We dispute not, Father.
But reason itself forbids that we should not con-
sider
How it shall be in that day
When our children rise up before us,
And demand of us to know
What things are theirs.

HAM

Indeed, Father, this is the question,
And this alone,
That brings us here for judgment.
For Shem,
Being the eldest son,
Affirms that his eldest son should be betrothed to
Rachel his cousin, the daughter of Japheth,
That thereby the portion of Japheth
Should come at length unto the seed of Shem.

SHEM

And that is just and right and according to the
Law.

HAM

Nay, brother,
Herein it is that you are wrong.
For already I,
Being the second son,
Have but a meagre share beside thine.
And surely it is but fair and honest
That the portion of Japheth should be added to my
lowly portion,
Rather than that it should go to swell thy portion
Which is already overgrown.

SHEM

Would you impute, then, that the portion of my inheritance is greater than my desert?

HAM

I impute nothing, brother.

SHEM

Ah, but your thoughts are envious. I know them.
And did I not overhear you in your prayers
Making petition to God
That the wife of Japheth might be barren of male
issue,
Lest a son should be born to him
And all your evil designs be brought to naught?

HAM

What are my prayers to you?
Spy!
And if I would, I also might tell a tale
Of your own prayers
And of a sacrifice you made . . .

NOAH

Let be, let be.
Must the ears of your father be hurt by a tale of
such baseness?
And you, Japheth,
Do you keep silence against this wrong that is
done?

JAPHETH

I am silent, father,
For I have nothing to say.

And after all,
What is a man's daughter
But a marriage portion to be bought by the highest
bidder,
Or taken by force of him that proves he has the
right of law ?
Nevertheless
Maybe the day will come when Rachel shall be
avenged,
And when I, her father, shall laugh my brethren to
scorn.
For here now Shem boasteth that he is the eldest
son.
And Ham boasteth of his Canaan.
But let him beware, I say,
Lest Canaan this son of his be cursed with a
terrible curse,
And lest I—
Even I—
Be blessed with stalwart boys that shall inherit the
land in his despite.
Let him beware, I say. Let him beware . . .

SHEM

Our brother hath an evil tongue it seems !

HAM

I heed him not.
Let him persuade another wife to his bed
Ere he comes prating thus to me of sons !

NOAH

Peace, Peace.
To every man his own sorrow.

And now I will hear no more.
Yet since you, my sons, have come to me for
judgment,
This is the thing that I judge.
You are to blame, Shem and Ham,
For you have done evil,
Disputing together to your own hurt.
But Japheth is blameless ;
And his daughter,
The virgin Rachel,
A virgin shall remain till such time as she is ripe
for marriage.
Then let her choose her own husband for herself,
Even him that best pleases her,
Whether it be of the sons of Shem or of the sons
of Ham.
And let none gainsay her.
This is my judgment.

SHEM

But Father . . .

HAM

But Father . . .

NOAH

Enough.

Get you gone.

I have spoken.

*Noah makes a gesture of dismissal, and his sons
cower back before him.*

No, Japheth,
Stay you behind ;
I have a word for you alone.

*Japheth comes back into the middle of the Hold,
while his two brothers begin to mount the ladder,
gathering up their robes about them.*

Come nearer, Japheth,
My latest born,
My best beloved.

They are alone now.

Have you nothing to say to me ?

JAPHETH

For your judgment in this matter I thank you.

NOAH

Is your mind eased,
And is your sorrow comforted ?

JAPHETH

For Rachel's sake, I am glad.
But for myself I care not.
And why should I care ?
What am I, father, but a man ?
And hath it not already repented the Lord God that
he ever made man ?
Verily, if we were beings of sense,
Think you that we should be now here ?
Should we not rather have lain face downwards
upon the fields at home,
While the great rain fell upon us and consumed us
utterly,
With all the rest of creation ?
And found peace amid the deep waters ?

NOAH

So you too, Japheth !
Into your heart also has the iron entered.
And here in this Ark that was builded to keep alive
the praise of God from all his creatures,
Even here is nothing but the bitterness of despair.

JAPHETH

Shem and Ham despair not.

NOAH

Their lusts preserve them.

JAPHETH

And you, Father,
You do not despair.

NOAH

Little you know of me, son—
Less, maybe, than I know of you.

JAPHETH

But you are he that encouraged us all from the
beginning,
And bade us build the Ark,
And kept high our spirit with your prophecy of
better days.
So if your hopefulness be gone,
What weapon remains against despair ?

NOAH

I know, I know, Japheth.
But you need not rebuke me,

For continually do I fight within myself
This battle with despair.
And I revive the memory of youthful days,
When all the world seemed beautiful,
And love itself was enough ;
And then the middle years of toil and increase ;
And thereafter the latter years
When I would sit before the door of the tent
And see you, my children, growing up around me,
Learning love in your turn,
And the happiness of toil.
And calling to mind such things
I would say that life was good.
Yet now what is left ?
I am old and the world is overwhelmed,
And my sons are not as the generous men of old,
 but are filled with malice and greed.
And the animals wax hungry,
And just as my sons,
Lusting after many possessions,
Have fallen into hatred one against the other,
Even so also they,
The lion and the eagle, the wolf and the hawk,
Fall to devour their fellows in the darkness of the
 ship.
Thus you may see how the world,
If ever we come back to it alive,
Shall be given over to the beasts that slay and
 devour.
For gentleness is dead,
And all the kindness that was in the earth.

JAPHETH
Poor Father !

NOAH

Well may you pity me ;
You are stronger than I now.
And this, indeed, is the reason why I have desired
to speak with you.

JAPHETH

What do you want of me, Father ?

NOAH

I would ask you a question.
It is a simple question,
And you must answer truthfully.
DO YOU DESIRE THAT THIS WORLD SHOULD GO ON ?

JAPHETH

DO I DESIRE THAT THE WORLD SHOULD GO ON ?

NOAH

If you had the power,
Like God,
To unmake the world—
If you held in the hollow of your hand the whole
creation,
What would you do ?
Speak.
You are a young man,
You should know.

JAPHETH

But no one could destroy the world.

NOAH

You think not ?

He beckons Japheth to follow him over to the dark corner where is the bung of the Ark.

You see that chain . . .

JAPHETH

I see it.

NOAH

On that chain hangs the fate of all created life.

JAPHETH

Father . . .

NOAH

One morning, Japheth,
When I descended, as is my custom, for the daily
measure of flour,
I heard a soft sound from this dark corner,
And coming over
I found that the wooden pin that holds the bung in
place
Had slipped in its socket,
So that the bung was loosened a little,
And from one side of it
There came a thin spray of water
Spurting out into the Hold.
It was easy to press back the bung,
And to slip the wooden pin into place,
But what happened once
Might happen again ;

And since then,
Every morning
I have been careful to come and see that all was well.
And standing here, with my hand on the chain,
I have thought how easy a thing it would be
To loosen the pin in its socket,
To see that spray of water start again into the
 Hold,
And then
To slip quietly away,
Away up the ladder,
While the bung gave
Little by little,
And that spray of water grew into a stream,
And then a great spout of water, churning far
 into the Hold.
Slowly at first,
But ever quicker and more quick,
The Hold would fill with water.
And as it filled
The Ark would sink,
Lower and lower . . .

JAPHETH (after a long silence)
You have strange thoughts, Father.

NOAH

I am an old man, Japheth,
And the old have oftentimes strange thoughts,
Although they seldom speak them.

JAPHETH

Why, then, have you chosen to speak your thoughts
to me now ?

NOAH

Because it is you that must tell me what to do.

JAPHETH

It is God who must tell you that.

NOAH

God hath his reckoning with me alone.

But now my reckoning is with man.

I hold the fate of mankind within these fingers.

Let man choose.

JAPHETH

You should ask the rather of my brothers.

NOAH

They love life.

It is clear beforehand what they would say.

JAPHETH

Knowing then my weakness,

You would tempt me.

NOAH

I love you, Japheth, child of my begetting.

Your weakness is dearer to me than the strength of
ten.

I would not tempt you,

And well you know what word it is that I hope to
hear you speak.

JAPHETH (*after another silence*)

Father, I cannot speak that word.

You gave me life,

But here—

If you ask for the truth—

I stand before you and I say,
Take it again.
For life to those who think is misery,
And the end of all things is the hope of all.
Verily you cheat yourself
If you believe that in giving judgment awhile ago
between my brethren
You have contented them for more than a day.
For looking ahead to the time that shall be when
the flood is ended,
I foresee trouble, trouble, and trouble urther yet.
I am a man of peace, Father,
And I love the arts and the labours of peace ;
They call me the ' maker.'
But what virtue is there in making
For other men to destroy ?
And if not men—God ?
For He, it seems, is the greatest destroyer of all.
This, then, is my answer :
Man is a weak and a puny thing at best,
But if by destruction he may make himself the
equal of God,
Why then,
For all I care,
Let the world,
Like a broken toy,
Turn again into the chaos whence it came.

NOAH (*almost inaudibly*)

Go, Japheth.

Japheth obeys, and Noah is left alone.

Noah remains for a while standing where he is.

*Then turns and sits down wearily on a clump of
coiled rope.*

So this is the end.
My son has rejected the life that I offered him—
My son,
For whom all my hope and labour has been
All my life long.
What more is there to do ?
This is the crown of my trouble.

Noah rises with arms outstretched.

Oh, God,
Now in my loneliness and despair
I turn to Thee,
Great creator of All,
And I charge Thee to speak from the dark abyss
where thou dwellest,
And if so be that thou hast any love remaining for
the generation of man,
Do thou make known thy will ;
Make it known, I say,
Lest ere long it be too late—
Too late even for Thee,
God !
For although thou mayest create another and a
better world,
Never again canst thou love it as a mother loves
her first-born child.
And if so be thou blamest me now for faithlessness,
Know this, O God,
That never of myself would I have done this thing,
And that I, even now, am but the instrument of
another's choice.
For did I not shudder in my soul when Japheth
spake that word which forbade me to hold my
hand ?

And myself have I not loved the world and hoped
for it ?

Yea, verily,
That day when Japheth came to me
With his boy's eyes all shining with pride and fear,
And showed me the arrow-head that he had made
of molten metal,

I indeed received his gift with few words ;
But none the less did I ponder the matter in my
heart,

And bethought me what further secrets might be
lurking under the great vault of the sky,
What new marvels for my sons and their sons'
children

To discover in the fulness of time.

And I was proud to be their father,
And in myself I felt the stir of miracles to be.

But now all that is done with,
For what is an arrow-head beside the heart's
happiness ?

And happiness is gone ;
And I, the creature of God,
Rise up against God in judgment.

Noah paces in agony up and down the Hold.

Oh, why was I born ?

Why was I born to carry in my soul the burden of
this doubt !

Ha !

And to think that the very men
For whom I am to do this deed
Will never live to thank me !

*He goes up to the bung, and stretches out his hand
towards the chain ; then speaks again very quietly.*

It is mid day.

My wife and my sons and their children lie upon
the deck asleep.

*Without having touched the chain he drops his
hand.*

O God! O God!

He comes back towards the front of the Hold.

God has not spoken.

He will not speak.

It may be there is no God. . . .

*Suddenly there is a livid flash of lightning that
illumines for an instant the darkest recesses of the
Hold, followed almost immediately by a crash of
thunder. The whole Ark shivers from top to
bottom. Noah staggers back into an attitude of
rigidity. For from the bung-hole of the Ark a
great jet of water is spurting out into the Hold. It
seems to gather volume every moment, and splashes
up in a cloud of white spray where it strikes the
floor.*

*With a loud cry Noah runs to the bung and tries
to press it back into place.*

*Almost at the same moment Shem, Ham, and Japheth
come hastily down the ladder.*

SHEM

The ship has been struck by lightning!
Father, where are you?

HAM

Father!

JAPHETH

Father! Father!

Now they have caught sight of Noah struggling at the bung, and they hurry over to him with cries of encouragement and exhortation.

Japheth tears off a great piece of linen from his robe and stuffs it into the hole.

The water ceases to pour in.

SHEM

But how did it happen ?

HAM

I think the lightning must have struck the side of the ship. . . .

SHEM

And not a cloud in the sky !
Most strange !

HAM

Did you feel it even here, Father ?

But Noah makes no reply.

He has sunk back against the timbered wall of the ship. His head is held between his hands.

JAPHETH

Father . . .

NOAH (lifting his head, and staring in front of him like one who has seen a vision):

The Lord is merciful.

JAPHETH

Are you hurt, Father ?

NOAH

No matter. No matter. It will pass. . .
But now I am broken.

JAPHETH

Tell me.

NOAH

God was too strong, Japheth.
He spake His word and the fire descended.
He struck His bolt and the waters flowed.

SHEM

Yet it was you that saved the Ark!

NOAH

Oh, yes,
It was I that saved the Ark.
Another moment and the waters would have rent
the sides away.
And then no power on earth,
Not God Himself,
Could have stopped them.

SHEM

You have done this day a mighty deed!

HAM

You have saved the world, Father!

NOAH

Have I, Shem and Ham?
But what say *you*, Japheth?

JAPHETH*(*bowing his head*)

I am ashamed.

NOAH

And I am glad.

I accept.

Yes. . . .

Noah rises.

For now all is over,

The lesson is learnt,

And once again

Time reaches out before the race of man—

Man who is both the servant and the master ;

And his will lieth within the will of God

Like seed in the hand of the sower.

SHEM

Our Father speaks strange words.

He is even as one talking in his sleep.

HAM

His eyes are wide open. . .

NOAH

Hark! Listen!

Noah comes forward to the front of the Hold.

A long silence.

SHEM

What is it, Father?

NOAH

Cannot you hear?

SHEM

No, Father.

HAM

Nothing.

NOAH

You hear it, Japheth ?

So gentle

It might be the very breath of the Spirit of God. . . .

JAPHETH (after a further silence)

I hear the sound of a dove

Cooing.

NOAH

THE DOVE HAS RETURNED TO THE ARK.

JAPHETH

Rachel's dove.

NOAH

Go.

Find and tell her, Japheth.

OTHER FANCIES

THE INVOCATION

GRAVE God who gazest darkly down,
Silent and cold and still,
What broods beneath that furrowed frown,
What lingering grace of old renown,
What dreams of good or ill ?

Mere stone are you, and nothing more
Than mask on emptiness ?
Were you alive, could you restore
To me, a beggar at the door,
Lost hope of happiness ?

Eros unknown! Eternal Flower!
All other help being vain,
Let me believe! For one short hour
Renew for me your ancient power,
Assuage and heal my pain !

And, if no sacrifice I bring
Of kid or tender goat,
And, if the modern words I sing
Hollow and empty seem to ring,
Untuned to mystic note,

Yet, humble worshipper from afar,
Love's ministry I claim,
And by all sacred things that are,
By noonday sun and evening star,
Eros, I name Thy Name !

NYMPH'S AWAKENING

DOWN in a glen wandering over-bold
Asleep I found my love to-day.
A flower among the flowers she lay,
A fairy flake of cream and gold.

She slept like a quiet thought. But while
I yearned and waited, love's glad fool,
As a ripple stirring a still pool
So rippled round her lips a smile.

Then say, my heart, did her dream come true
When, like quivering wings of butterflies,
Those delicate curtains of her eyes
Rifted their hidden deeps of blue,
Then say, O my heart, did her dream come true ?

A BOY SINGS IN THE MORNING

M AID of fair delight,
Sheperding thy sheep
In the twinkling light
By the waters deep
Where the fairies sleep,

All for me this day
Streaks the Eastern sky,
And the star-light shy
Meekly fades away,
Loth to stay
With thee to vie.

For to-night,
By Cupid's might,
Not as maid unwed
Shalt thou find thy bed
By some shady rill,
When the yellow moon,
Glad Harvest's boon,
Strides the Western hill.

DANTE'S DREAM

UNDER her shroud, with golden head upturned
And breast all tremulous with life's last breath,
Beatrice lies. Sunset has almost burned
Itself away. The night is here, and Death.

How lovely in death she is! How lovely in life!
Eyes that were blue—lips that were crimson red!
See, for his sake, who feared to call her Wife,
Love's very self leans lightly above her bed.

The sun is down. Dead is the dying day.
Beatrice, Dante, they are fled away
Where the dead lovers are that sigh alway.
And yet, O my Love, do you and I delay?

NEIGE D'ANTAN

PINK and white, pink and white,
O my love, my dead delight!

White was her forehead,
White was her breast,
Whiter than the white bed
Where she used to rest,

And pink through her night-gown,
Like roses in a mist,
Twin truant buds from heaven blown down,
Craving to be kissed.

Pink and white, pink and white!
My love! My dead delight!

FROM RONSARD

DEAREST, shall we find that rose
Which did this very morn unclose
Her crimson raiment to the sun,
If now, perchance, the day being done,
She hath lost her dress so fine
And the bloom that equalled thine ?

Alas! In what a little space,
Dearest, from her fragrant face
She these beauties all hath shed!
O cruel, cruel Nature, thou,
Since such a flower, so fair but now,
In one brief day is witherèd!

Dearest, then, this is thy duty:
While thou keepest yet thy beauty
Fresh and dazzling, green and stainless,
Pluck thy youth, for it is flying,
E'en as this flower now lies dying
Age will dim thy loveliness.

SHADOWS'

A SCENT on the air
As her own self sweet,
And time so fleet
Is all melted away like the glance of the shadows
Cast on her treasure of golden hair ;
And under the cliffs, in the breeze, by the shallows,
Once again she laughs and draws pictures again on
the sand.

Yes, yes. So let it live,
In a scent wafted back from a long dead past,
That day when I took her hand
And was ready my heart to give,
Yet knew that love might not last.

TRAMP'S HONEYMOON

SUN, cloud, sky. . . .

The air with summer scented thick,
And asleep in the shade of a soft hay-rick,
You and I.

Moon, stars, sky. . . .

Into grey of the dawn fades the night of blue,
And there on a dim white road, just you—
You and I.

THE SECRET

SHE stood by the gate where the white road
stretches down either side to the plain below ;
And the wind swept by with its mingled murmurs,
and the dead leaves scattered to and fro.
In the East hung a star that palely glittered :
She said never a word.
Only there came a smile that twittered
Round her lips like the song of a bird.

Did she love me, say, for half one instant, while
the sun dropt over that edge of hill ?
I could not ask her. I could not question the
silence that followed, that follows still.
There was nothing of course in it all, for she
uttered
No sigh, no word.
Yet, how well I remember that smile ! It
fluttered
Round her lips like the flight of a bird !

THE OLD LADIES

WHAT are you doing, Old Ladies, down there
by the shore,
By the grey sea shore ?
Can your hearts be so light,
Can the sun shine so bright,
Are the pebbles so smooth as before
Your hair turned white ?

Yet there's something that made you smile down
there by the shore,
By the green cragged shore ;
Was it just the fine day ?
Or that out from the bay
Came a whisper that seemed to restore
Dreams half faded away ?

SIC TRANSIT

ONE with the land of past delight,
One with a joy that's sped,
One with the memoried touch and sight
Of beauty that has fled,

One with Thee, must I still be old,
Still feel, as the years slip by,
Love and light and life grow cold,
Flicker and fade, and die!

A LOVE REJECTED

WITH rigid arms I held away from me
The girl who loved me. Bright with a veil
of tears
Her eyes, so pitifully, sorrowfully blue,
Met mine in an agony of trust denied.
The poor proud spirit of a woman spurned
Was in that glance. Its tenderness mocked, its
strength
Made weakness. Even so a mother's heart
Goes crying sometimes hungry through the world
For the little boy that cruelly grows up,
For the wanderer who will not come back home.

LILY

BRIGHT to my sense you seem
As some pale dream
Of the moonlight.

You are so white ;
So white, compounded
With the delicate tint of a sea-shell.
And all you had to sell
I've bought and sounded,
Save, Lily, your heart.
And that, though I rivet
And lock it down with my gold key
Still, still escapes me—
And must, till you give it.

Yes, till then, Lily white,
All our loves must seem
More wan than a dream
Of moonlight. . . .

THE RED HOUSE

O H, come, my love, to the uplands,
For I've built a house for you,
A white house high in the uplands
Where the sky is clear and blue.

*O love, it is bleak on the uplands,
The wind blows restlessly
As night creeps over the uplands,
And the lambs bleat piteously.*

Then come down, my love, to the hollow,
It's homely, and quiet, and fair,
For I've built a grey house in the hollow,
And no one else will be there.

*Oh, I fear the damp in the hollow,
And all the homeliness
Of your grey house in the hollow
Will be spoiled by its loneliness.*

O grey house, O white house,
That have earned my love's disdain,
O white house, O grey house,
Have I built you both in vain?

*No, no! But down by the highroad
(Oh, carry me there, I pray) —
There's a red house down by the highroad,
I dreamed of it yesterday.*

*Oh, I dreamed, I dreamed of a red house
With a wide and lofty door,
And I dreamed it was built where the brave, strong
men
Went riding away to the war,
And I dreamed that the strong and brave men
Came riding back amain,
With a wave of their hands and a lift of their hearts
As I smiled through the window-pane.*

O sweet love, O true love,
Your word is a law to me.
By the side of the winding road, love,
A red house presently
Shall rise like a banner to heaven,
And your dream shall be builded again ;
Yet I fear, O sweet, O true love,
The march of those strong, brave men

LOVE LIES BLEEDING

SING!

From your joy's brimming goblet
Let fall here and there
Drops that I,
I and any chance wayfarer,
May capture
And treasure.

Hist!

Do you hear
Through the wide open window
Her soul come a'sailing,
In a silver sphere of sound,
Poised perfectly,
Come sailing towards me?

Enough!

Take care,
Take heed,
Lest I catch it in passing,
Lest I crush it to nothing,
And the song and the singer
Cease for ever!

LE SPECTRE DE LA ROSE

OPEN your eyes that close
To this maiden dream so light ;
I am the wraith of a rose
You wore at the dance last night.
You gathered me pearly and wet
With the silver tears of the dew ;
In that glittering throng I let
You carry me all night through.

You were my death, you know,
But you cannot keep away
My rosy spirit ; to and fro
It shall dance by your bed till day.
Be not afraid—I ask no dole
Of pity or prayers or sighs ;
This scented sweetness is my soul,
And it comes from Paradise.

Envy, rather, my fate :
For many would die to rest,
So pure and so consecrate,
In the tender tomb of your breast—
On its marble front to repose
Where a poet's kiss for me
Has written : Here lies a rose
Where a king might give all to be !

(From Théophile Gautier.)

THE LITTLE BALLET

SCENE, the grounds of a French chateau.
Time, eleven or twelve or so
Of a moonlit midsummer night.
Hither Élise, all in white,
Comes walking in the garden late,
Lured by chance, or perhaps by fate,
To a bosky glade unknown,
And a pond with lilies grown.

At the further side of the pond
Are some steps, and then beyond,
A little paved and grassy square,
Three-sided, with a hew hedge fair,
And in the middle gleaming grey,
What nearly frightens her away,
A Figure standing all alone
So quiet you might have thought it stone.

It is in fact a statue. There
It stands with empty eyes a-stare,
And carven sides by sculptor's art
Moulded true in every part
To show the body of a boy,
Tense with manhood's ripening joy,
Yet hinting through its beauty bold
The loveliness of all things old.

For the statue's crumbled face,
And its limbs, bear trace on trace
Of moss and weathered veins of green
With many a watery stain between.
Antique it is beyond a doubt,
The budding lips curved suavely out
In a melancholy smile,
All mystery and classic guile.

Élise laughs to think that she
At such a sight could frightened be ;
And for proof of self-reliance,
Or it may be of defiance
(Moonlight maddens many a maid
That were else discreet and staid),
To the statue needs must haste
To print a kiss upon its waist.

Towards the lovely boy she has leant,
Her breast against the stone is pent.
She gives her kiss, and then upturns
Her eye to his. That blind gaze burns
Her cheek to red, and she could swear
Something has ruffled through her hair.
The breeze? Or warm and living breath
Stirring from that face of death ?

Élise would have run away,
But amazement bids her stay.
For now she feels the statue shiver,
And down its limbs, like rippling river,
Muscle swell and sinew twist
With strength no marble could resist.
Then—is it dream or naked truth?—
Down from his pedestal steps the youth.

His arms are out and she is near.
Surely a dream—yet some strange fear
Forbids to taste of that delight
Which, dreaming, should have been her right.
Rather she lifts her hand to shield
Secrets that no maid may yield,
And, turning on her dainty feet,
Trips off. The statue follows fleet.

O midsummer moonlight! Sweet employ!
Flying, following, girl and boy!
This way, that way, in and out,
Behind the hedge and round about
The liliated pool, now here, now there,
Scuttering, fluttering, light as air,
Hither and thither, to and fro,
Dodging, doubling, watch them go!

He has caught her. No, she's off too fast !
Yet man must have his way at last.
With a leap that spans the pool,
Breaking every decent rule
Of hide-and-peek, he makes his capture.
Now for the longed-for thrilling rapture
Of kisses given and returned,
The prize his long pursuit has earned.

Panting she lies there in his arms,
Swooning, faint with love's alarms.
But he stands motionless and bent,
Listening, suddenly intent.
For someone's coming. He can hear
Muted steps approaching near.
Someone's coming out to search
For the bird that's left its perch.

Quick as thought he lifts her high
On his shoulder. Then with eye
Backward cast, prances away
To the woods. He will not stay
Till he finds the hawthorn hedge
That circles round the garden's edge.
There they'll be in safety soon,
And leagues away by set of moon.

Too late arrives the mortal lover.
The wretched man cannot discover
Anything. Not the littlest trace
Of her from whom was all his grace.
Only with his lantern wan
He finds the Grecian statue gone,
And lying on its base all bare
The scarf his loved one used to wear.

Does he put two and two together?
Does he pause to question whether
Statue of stone can come to life
And take unto itself a wife?
I do not know. Nor is it mine
Occult theories to refine;
One thing only now is certain,
Light flicks up, and down drops curtain!

DINARD: 1913

A SUNNY PLACE, it has been called,
for People that are Shady.
And in truth you can talk there
with a certain kind of lady,
Regardless of relations
or of Madam Grundy's frown;
And there's lots of fun at Dinard
when the sun goes down.

All through the day the children play
along the sandy shore;
They run about and paddle there
till they can run no more;
And evening brings a comfy bed,
a kiss, and a cool night-gown.
But the men wake up at Dinard
when the sun goes down.

There are several other places
on the coast to Paramé,
Where for francs and five-franc-pieces
the blinking tourists play.
Oh, that's the game for tinsel souls
and souls of copper brown!
They play for gold at Dinard
when the sun goes down.

Hush! for the moon's a-glimmer
along the silver sand;
Out from the white casino
comes the tinkle of a band.
If you've lost the love and money
that you brought with you from town,
*You can cut your throat at Dinard—
now the sun's gone down.*

A BALLAD OF BLOIS

O H, Blois she is a fine town
With her Chateau on the hill,
Her walls are old and cracked and brown,
Her past is living still ;
Yet there's something I have lost there
That I would like to find,
Though I have half forgotten
What it is I've left behind !

Oh, the Loire's a lovely river
As he winds across the plain,
Bright as a path of silver
Or as sunlight seen through rain ;
Yet there's something I have lost there
And never more may find,
And it seems so very careless
To have left it there behind !

At Blois they gave me dark wine
(The strong man waxeth stronger),
At Blois they gave me light wine
(The long tongue waggeth longer),
Yet there's something that they took from me,
Something I cannot find,
And not a soul to tell me
What it is I've left behind !

In Blois there grows a red rose
Upon a little tree ;
In Blois there grows a red rose—
It seemed to grow for me ;
Now, far away, the scent of it
Comes wafted up the wind. . .
*Do you think it is my Heart
That I've left at Blois behind ?*

THE MONK OF FIESOLE

WE'RE dull, you say,
And in the Monastery have to pray
All day ?

Well, in the quiet skies,
As the glad day dies,
I've often seen
A beauty more serene
Than the noon's best ;
At least there's rest.

So even here
(No need to sneer)
For ease
There's just your soul to please
With little flowers
And bowers,
And for delight
The starry night,
And over all Christ's cross. . . : .
No : to lose the world's no loss !

VENETIAN ECHO

DOMES high up in the sky somewhere,
Weeds and oleanders here,
Here in this little court.
And silence passing thought,
Except for a flutter now and then
Of birds, invisible, far away,
A mile—who knows—or ten,
In the sunny summer day. . . .

LISTEN

FOR now an endless story will I tell you, dear,
Not of to-day, not of to-morrow, nor last year.
Last Year is sadly faded, and To-day must go
To mingle darkly in To-morrow's overthrow;
But Love, of every life the harbinger and breath,
Eternally renewed, derides and conquers Death.

THE BELLS OF PARADISE

O BELLS of Paradise, I hear you ringing
In happy work, in sweet bird's singing;
Over the sunlit fields of June
The murmuring bee echoes your tune.

And in the passion of girl and boy,
Pure gold of youth without alloy,
And in the mind of a man that's glad
Or, well it may be, wounded and sad

For truth's sake, there your voice is clear
Chanting love's carillon for ever dear.
But more than all, and of all most,
In the flaked innocence of the Host,

Victim and Priest and God in one,
Loveliest of all things under the sun,
In that white silence breathes your chime,
Incarnate Timelessness in Time.

This is the faith we men live by.
Proved or disproved, hereon rely
All dreams, all longings to do well,
All hope of heaven, all hate of hell.

Oh, may I hear those bells at last
When all my joy of earth is past,
And death, like ocean calm and deep,
Floods out my life in deathless sleep.

ENVOI: FOR M.A.

A WHILE the giver dreamed with you,
Then take the gift for the dead dream's sake.
For they that dream must always wake,
And never yet has a dream come true,
And ever the best is what has been ;
Though between us lie naught but the sea so green
And the hills so blue.

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